

Q. What determines whether someone is elect or reprobate?

A. Many good, Bible-believing Christians would answer this question with one word: "Nothing." Their reasoning would be that, because election is unconditional, then nothing determines whether someone is elect or reprobate. But the answer is not so simple. What determines whether an animal is a squirrel or a turtle? Certainly, no choice the animal made determines its species, and no works the animals does makes it either a squirrel or a turtle. So, being a squirrel or a turtle is unconditional as far as the animal is concerned. Yet, we would have to agree that something determines whether it is a squirrel or a turtle, something that is outside of the control of the animal. So, can election be both unconditional and determined by something?

Elect In Eternity

The Bible says that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). "Chose" is from the Greek word, *exelaxato*. *Exelaxato* is, in turn, from *eklego*. *Eklego* means to choose or elect. *Vines's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* gets the definition of *eklego* right, but then becomes irrational: "'to pick out, select,' means, in the middle voice, 'to choose for oneself,' not necessarily implying the rejection of what is not chosen...." But it is not possible to not reject something you have not chosen. To not choose and to reject are synonyms. To select from All People some that we will call Group A for a particular purpose and to not select others that we will call Group B logically implies that we have rejected Group B for the purpose for which we have chosen Group A. There can be no getting around this.

You might also want to read: "Did God deliberately reprobate the non-elect?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/doublepredestinationqa.htm>)

If the captain of a sinking ship with too few lifeboats makes the decision that only women and children will go into the lifeboats, he has chosen the women and children to go into the lifeboats and he has rejected the men from going into the lifeboats. He may be very kind to

the men during the rest of their lives on the sinking ship, but he has clearly rejected them from the lifeboats.

Ephesians 1:5 goes on to explain that those whom, as we saw in verse 4, God chose before the foundation of the world, He "predestined...for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire." The Greek for the "foundation of the world" literally means the "throwing down of the cosmos," as a potter throws down a lump of clay before making something out of it. So, before God even started the cosmos, before He made any people at all, He chose some people that He would adopt as His sons through Jesus Christ. (The Greek does not say "children," it says "sons": this is important because, anciently, sons normally inherited and daughters did not.) In eternity, God had people in mind that He would in time bring into the world and save through Jesus Christ and adopt as His sons and heirs together with Christ (see Romans 8:17). These are the elect or the chosen. The rest of humanity are usually called the reprobate.

Paul writes of God, "who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Good News" (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

Romans 8:29 tells us, "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." "Foreknew" is from *proginōskō*. It means to "know before." Before the foundation of the world, God knew us as those whom He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. Read Romans 8:29-30 and you will see the sequence of events that initiates with God's knowing His elect in eternity and culminates with His glorifying them. We see this once more in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14: "But we are bound to always give thanks to God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth; to which he called you through our Good News, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, if God chose some for salvation, then He obviously did not choose the rest. But what underlies this choosing?

In 1 Peter 1:1-2, Peter writes of the elect: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen ones who are living as foreigners in the

Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." He speaks of "the chosen ones...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Notice that Peter emphasizes God's foreknowledge; His knowing the elect beforehand. In 1 Peter 2:7-8, he contrasts the elect with the reprobate: "For you who believe therefore is the honor, but for those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone,' and, 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' For they stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed." Peter does not teach free will or that everyone has an equal chance for salvation. He teaches that there are people whom God has chosen to obey Jesus and be sprinkled with His blood and there are people whom God has appointed to disobey. In his second epistle, Peter speaks of the latter group as "unreasoning creatures, born natural animals to be taken and destroyed" (2 Peter 2:12).

In Acts 13:48, we read this sentence: "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Another way of saying this is that none who were appointed to eternal life did not believe. Thus, all who did not believe were not appointed to eternal life. They were not elect. God chose some people for salvation and adoption as His sons, and He did not choose other people. Why?

One Lump, Two Destinies

The Bible clearly teaches that our works have nothing to do with God's choices. God did not choose the elect because of good works (including knowing ahead that they would believe in Jesus), and He did not reject the reprobate because of bad works (including knowing ahead that they would not believe in Jesus). There are elect people with life sentences in prison for heinous crimes, and there are reprobate people who are nice to know and who do many charitable works.

But works, no matter how good, don't save us: "Not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). In Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus says, "Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your

name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'" Prophesying in Jesus' name and casting out demons are not normally considered iniquitous works. Jesus calls these people workers of iniquity because they expected to buy their salvation with their works. What Jesus implies here is a connection between salvation and His knowing us—that is, His knowing us as elect.

In John 10:14-15, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep." Jesus lays down His life for those He knows.

Notice what Jesus prays to the Father in John 17:9: "I pray for them. I don't pray for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours." Jesus plainly says here that the world and the Father's people whom He has given to Jesus are two distinct groups.

We've already seen that works are not a factor in distinguishing the groups, and neither is genetics. Of Jacob and Esau, Paul says, "For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls, it was said to her [Rebekah], 'The elder will serve the younger.' Even as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Romans 9:11-13). Before they were born, Jacob and Esau had done nothing to earn either love or hate. As far as genetics, they came from the same parents. The difference was in God's mind in eternity. He had chosen one and rejected the other.

As Romans 9:21 explains, "Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honour, and another for dishonour?" God is the Potter. From the "lump" we call humanity, He can make some to believe and be saved by His Son and others to disbelieve and be damned. The amorphous lump, the living flesh and blood of mankind from which He is making the two groups, is all the same. But the two groups that He fashions from that lump are not alike. A lump of clay can make a toilet bowl destined for one function and a fine vase with an entirely different destiny. The material is the same but the two end results are different. Why? Because they were *inherently* different in the mind of the maker. As motivational speaker and writer, Earl Nightingale, said, "Everything begins with an idea."

The Elect and the Reprobate in God's Mind

God is the Maker of humanity. He made us all from one "lump," but His idea for humanity predates the "lump." In eternity He has always had two different groups with two completely different destinies in mind. This is why the Bible can speak of vessels for honor and vessels for dishonor. Jesus told us of a time when there will be a separation of the wheat from the chaff (Matthew 3:12), the good fish from the bad fish (Matthew 13:47-48), and the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32-33). The elect are represented by the vessels of honor, the wheat, the good fish, and the sheep. The vessels for dishonor, the chaff, the bad fish, and the goats depict the reprobate. Each group has its respective destiny because that is the way it is in God's mind in eternity.¹

In the Parable of the Tares of the Field (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43), Jesus again divides humanity into two groups. They look so similar that they can't be divided until the end of the world, at which time one group will be burned and the other "will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." One group, the good seed, are the sons of the kingdom. The other group, the tares (darnel, weeds), are the sons of the wicked one, the devil. In other words, just as God gave the elect to His Son (John 10:29; 17:24), so He has given the reprobate to the devil. (Read more about the Parable of the Tares in this article) (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par2tares.htm>).

The elect and the reprobate are from the same lump. But they are not from the same concept. They are fundamentally different ideas in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world. We might say that they are different spiritual species. Such a difference that is so fundamental that the reprobate can do nothing to overcome it is today not politically correct. But it is what the Bible teaches. (By the way, the reprobate don't *want* God's grace, so we mustn't think that God is cruel.)

Since God has not based the distinction on anything we do, the elect cannot boast, "except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). Also, we must keep in mind that we cannot know who is reprobate. No matter how bad someone may be, as far as we know, he or she may be elect and, therefore, has the potential to repent and

¹ Grammatical tenses make no sense when speaking of eternity, so I am trying to get out of the habit of speaking of it in the past tense. Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

believe and be saved. Therefore, our evangelizing must be indiscriminant.

God does not choose whom He will save and whom He will damn based on what people do. Instead, He has the classes of humans distinct in His mind in eternity. Since God does not change, we must conclude that these classes are not decisions or choices in which God went from one construct to another, but that the elect and the reprobate are inherently distinct in His mind. Similarly, which individuals make up each class must also be inherent in His mind. Thus, just as God knows the hairs on our heads and the sparrow that falls to the ground, He knows in detail who are His children and who are the devil's. A person's position in either election or reprobation is in God's mind in eternity.

Election and reprobation are the concepts in God's mind that determine our destiny, what the Bible calls being predestined: "Having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire" (Ephesians 1:5). Nevertheless, God uses other means in time to get us to that destiny.

God, in the concept in His mind known as election, foreknows whom He will save but election does not do the saving. Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross saves, and, in time, what is in God's mind comes to fruition as the Holy Spirit calls us, regenerates us, and gives us the gift of belief in the Gospel.

God, in the concept in His mind known as reprobation, foreknows whom He will condemn but reprobation does not do the condemning. God will justly condemn the reprobate for their sinful works because they have not believed on the only name by which men can be saved (Revelation 20:12-13; Acts 4:12; John 3:36).

Salvation, therefore, is dependant on the work of Jesus Christ, with trust in that work being the instrument by which the sinner receives salvation. Damnation, because of the lack of the instrument of belief, reverts for its standard of judgment to the works of the sinner, which always condemn him. We must not confuse the classes of election and reprobation that are in God's mind in eternity with the means in time mentioned above by which God brings someone, according to the class to which he or she belongs, to either salvation or condemnation. Both election and reprobation are unconditional, eternally inherent, distinct spiritual classes of human beings that are in God's mind in eternity.

What determines whether someone is elect or reprobate? God does; that is, whether that person is in God's mind as part of the class of the elect or part of the class of the reprobate. Can election be both unconditional and determined by something? Certainly. Election is unconditional because there is nothing we must or can do to earn election. Yet, election is determined in eternity in God's mind.

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